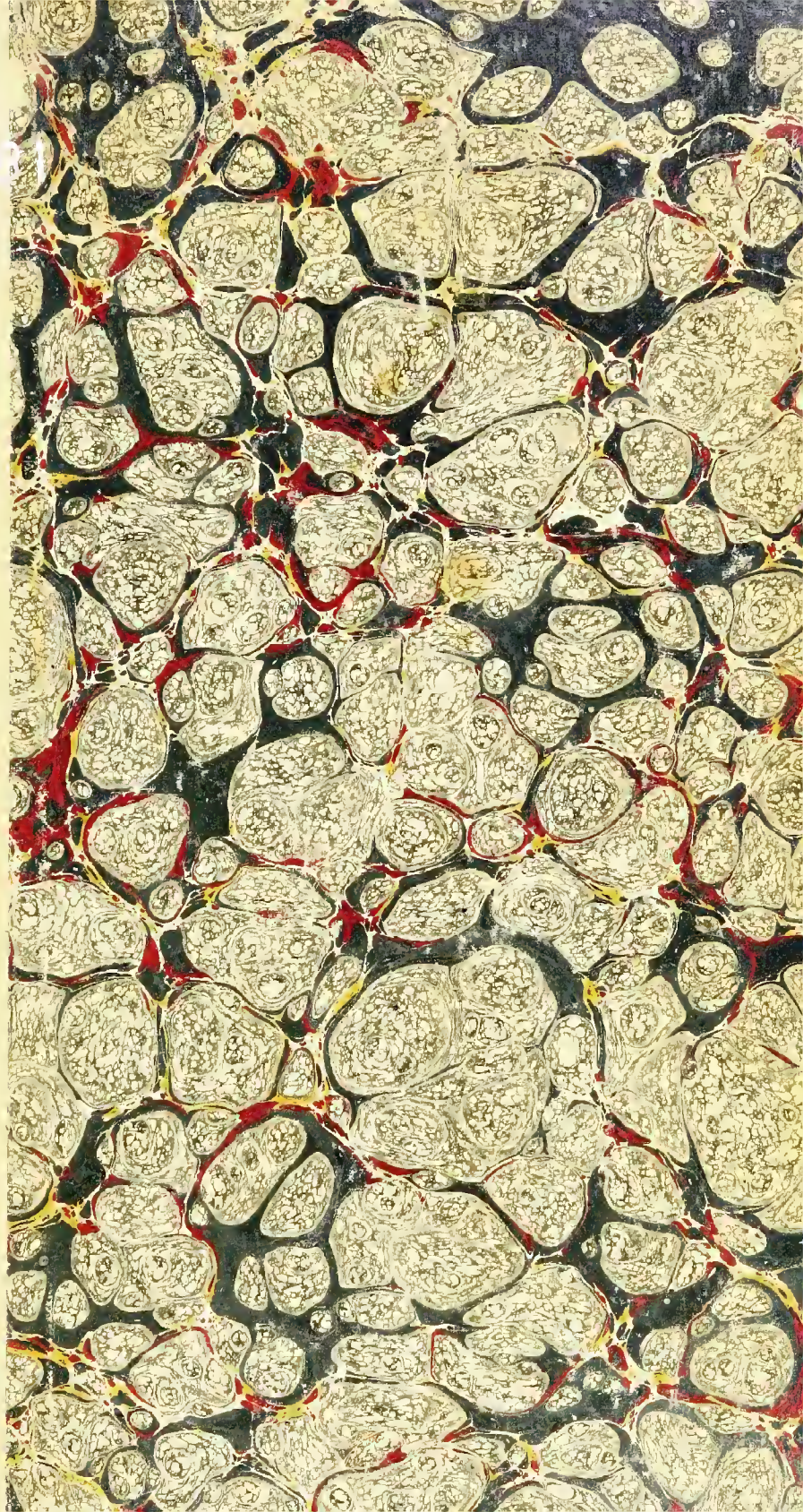
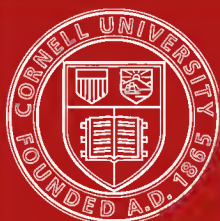






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Murray Mag. Feb. 1887

N Old Oxford Revels.



W. P. Courtney

ON the night of the 31st of October, 1607, a company of graduates and undergraduates were collected in the Hall of St. John's College to celebrate All Saints' Eve. The scene was a riotous one, because although the object of the meeting was to witness divers sports in preparation for Christmas, there appeared to be no clear arrangement what the sports should be or by whom they should be represented. The seniors were content to be onlookers; second-year men, called "Poulderlings," were anxious to exhibit their ability; but the freshmen, "Punies of the first year," were not remarkable for their patience, or their consideration for those whose superior years should have inspired respect. So great was the tumult, that no sports could on that night be held at all. The feast of All Saints on the following day brought a truce to these quarrels, owing to the happy suggestion made by the more thoughtful of the collegiate body, that they should appoint a Prince of the Revels, who should serve as a Christmas lord to superintend all the forthcoming festivities for the months of December and January. A "Christmas Prince" was an institution which had been derived from the older ceremony of a "Boy Bishop." On the feast of St. Nicholas, or Holy Innocents' Day, it was not unusual in cathedral churches to permit some one of the boys of the choir to assume the title and state of a bishop. The childish prelate arrogated to himself all the duties of his august office with the single exception of performing the Mass; and it is well known that Edward I., on his way to Scotland in the year 1299, allowed one of these Boy-Bishops to say Vespers before him in his Chapel at Heton, near Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The feast of the Boy-Bishop was put down by Henry VIII., revived by Queen Mary at the restoration of the Catholic religion, and finally interdicted by Queen

dull China blue. About five miles farther on Castle Mountain is before us, standing a sheer precipice 5000 feet high—a giant's "keep," with turrets, bastions, and battlements complete, reared against the sky.

As we rise toward the summit, near Stephen, about thirty-five miles farther on, the railway's grade gets steeper, tall forests gather round us, and a curious effect is produced by glimpses of snowy spurs and crests peeping through the trees, and of which, though apparently near us, we see no base. This conveyed to me an idea of our elevation, and it was delightful to think of oneself as hidden away among those solitary mountains, even for a few short hours, with all the troubles and worries of life left in noisy bustling cities far away!

At the Laggan Station, more than thirty miles from the summit, a huge engine,—in curious black contrast to a small white house near by,—stood on a siding with all steam up, waiting for our train. I then learned that this monster is necessary for the steep grades, both ascending and descending, over which we have to go.

The General Superintendent (whom I have already mentioned as having joined our party at Winnipeg—Mr. E.—) in an unlucky moment suggested I should walk forward, examine this big "mountain" engine, and see its heavy proportions and fine machinery. I say "unlucky," because from the instant my eyes rested on the broad shining surface of its buffer-beam and cowcatcher, over which a bright little flag waved from a glossy brass pole, I decided to travel there and nowhere else for the remaining 600 miles of my journey!

AGNES MACDONALD.

(To be concluded next month.)

Elizabeth. The Christmas Prince was the lay brother of the Boy-Bishop. He was elected to be a sort of master of the ceremonies in Christmas festivities of all kinds, whether in the King's palace or the homes of the nobility, in the Inns of Court or at the Universities. He was a "Lord of Misrule," or "Master of Merry Disports," taxing all his friends with a royal hand, and holding an acknowledged and undisputed sway till the Puritans came and swept all these pleasant diversions away.

When, then, the members of St. John's College in Oxford determined in 1607 to set up a Christmas Prince, they were not only following the example of Gray's Inn in 1594, but a precedent of their own in 1577. The appointment was not made without some trouble. Grave uncertainty prevailed as to whether they should choose a graduate or an undergraduate, and the only way of meeting the difficulty was to hold a formal election, in which each member of their society should be allowed to give his vote. At the High Table were seated the Vice-President and the Dean, while at the end of the Hall some of the more junior men, as is the manner of freshmen, amused themselves by shouting out the names of those whom they thought least able to fill the post. In the sequel a certain Mr. Thomas Tucker was elected, a worthy man who in subsequent life obtained the third stall in the Cathedral Church at Bristol. One of those who took part in the proceedings is the author of a manuscript, which describes the whole affair and is preserved in the Library of St. John's College;* he was a gentleman named Griffin Higgs, who appears to have distinguished himself in the exercise of proctorial duties, being a man, as an old chronicler says, "of little stature, but abundant courage."

Mr. Thomas Tucker, who was fortunate enough to obtain the dignity of a Christmas Prince, was careful to avoid the over-zealous enthusiasm of his supporters. On hearing the cries which announced his election he instantly hid himself, and, when the surging crowd had passed his lodging, managed to get secretly back to his college room. There at last the ambiguous honours were thrust upon an unwilling head, and more by violence than any will of his own he was carried down to the Hall, as the Prince elect for the forthcoming Christmas. Perhaps he was not in every sense the most suitable man for the post. Mr. Griffin Higgs, though anxious to excuse some of the events of his reign,

* Printed in 1816, and published by Triphook, Old Bond Street, London.

cannot forbear to state, that he had some weaknesses which did much to prejudice his state, "whereof the chiefest were his openness and familiarity with all sorts, being unwilling to displease any, yet not able to please all." His formal title ran as follows: "The most magnificent and renowned Thomas, by the favour of Fortune, Prince of Alba Fortunata, Lord St. John's, High Regent of Y^e Hall, Duke of St. Giles's, Marquesse of Magdalen's, Landgrave of y^e Grove, County palatine of y^e Cloisters, Chief bailiff of y^e Beaumonts, High Ruler of Rome, Master of the manor of Waltham, Governor of Gloucester Green." These titles were of course not chosen at random. "Alba Fortunata" alludes to the name of the Founder of the College, Sir Thomas White; St. Giles's and Magdalen are the parishes which border on St. John's; the Grove and the Cloisters are part of the home domain; Beaumonts is the name of some lands belonging to the College on which stood originally the Palace of the Beaumonts, built by King Henry I. and still surviving in the name of Beaumont Street; Rome was the name of a piece of land on the north side of Oxford, near a walk which used to be called Non Ultra. The manor of Waltham or Walton also belonged to the College, whilst Gloucester Green at that time was literally a meadow close to Gloucester Hall, from which it derived its name. The elected King's first task was to provide himself with money, and a rate was levied on all the members of the College according to their ability, the President being taxed to the extent of forty shillings, and Mr. Laud, who was none other than the future Archbishop of Canterbury, furnishing on two separate occasions sums of ten shillings. Naturally enough the Prince and his retinue were always falling short of funds, and not only were old members taxed for his support, but also the tenants of the College were requested to furnish various subsidies for the maintenance of the Royal state. Mr. Higgs, who tells the tale, himself contributed five shillings.

The public installation of the Prince took place on the evening of St. Andrew's Day. The first play was produced with the title of *Ara Fortunæ*, or *Fortune's Altar*. It was not an unmixed success. The Hall was so crowded, that it was with great difficulty that room could be cleared for the performance of the play. At the second burst of applause the canopy which overhung the Altar of Fortune suddenly collapsed, and the Prince's Fool, sitting down clumsily at his monarch's feet, had the ill-luck to break his staff in two. The next performance took place

on Christmas Day, when Prince Tucker sat down at the High Table in the Vice-President's place, and was served with a magnificent banquet, including the customary Christmas Boar's Head. The royal dish was brought in, to the accompaniment of the following song :—

1. The Boare is dead !
Loe heare is his head ;
What mañ could haue doñe more
Than his head of to strike,
Meleager like,
And bring it as I doe before ?
2. He livinge spoyled
Where good meñ toyled,
Which made kinde Ceres sorrye ;
But now dead and drawne
Is very good brawne,
And we have brought it for y^u.
3. Then sett down ye Swineyard,
The foe to y^e Vineyard ;
Lett Bacchus crowne his fall.
Lett this Boares-head and mustard
Stand for Pigg, Goose & Custard,
And so y^u are welcōme all.

Musicians, hired from Reading, "because our own town-music had given us the slip, as they use to do," played all dinner-time ; and the evening ended with an interlude, consisting of *Saturnalia* which were eminently successful, "because," says the narrator, "there were no strangers to trouble us."

Special efforts were made for the performance of a tragedy called *Philomela*. The carpenters were, however, by no means ready with the stage, and the Prince himself, who was to play the part of *Tereus*, had got an extremely bad cold in the head. He managed, however, to play his part ; and the performance seems to have gone off on Dec. 29 without more than the usual accidents. An entertainment on the evening of New Year's Day was less successful. The attempt was made to represent a show called *Time's Complaint*. At first the ceremony began auspiciously. The Prince and his suite passed through the Quadrangle, honoured by three successive volleys of shot from fifty or threescore guns ; but no sooner was the

play begun than the tale of misfortunes commenced. The 'prologue,' who had only six lines to say, clean forgot them all, and after a long stage-wait abruptly went behind the scenes. One of the comic characters was the Goodwife Spigott. Unfortunately she came on the boards before her proper time, and had to fill in the interval by some meaningless babble, which was not well appreciated by the audience. The low comedian in acting the part of Humphrey Swallow, a drunken cobbler, used his opportunities with a gusto which was anything but pleasing to the company at large. Like many amateur comedians, he had been so successful in the rehearsals that his head was apparently turned, and, when the eventful night came, he so emphatically over-acted his part that he delayed the action of the scene and only produced disgust. It must be added that the assembled company had so overfilled the stage, that it was almost impossible for the play to proceed. Mr. Griffin Higgs gets very melancholy over the ill-success of the venture. "We should be ashamed," he says, "to insert *Time's Complaint*, if we thought it would please no better in the reading than it did in the hearing. To speak the truth without boasting, we ourselves thought not so ill of it as others; neither will future times, we hope, judge it so vile as the present did. We were all so discouraged, however, that we could have found in our hearts to have gone no further." The treasury was by this time exhausted,* and a new tax was decided upon. Nothing is more

* The following are some of the items in the bill of expenses :

	£	s.	d.
Imprimis for 40 dozen of linkes	4	10	0
Item for 10 dozen of torches	4	10	0
Item for one dozen of great waxe tapers	0	15	0
Item for a shute of tawny safety for the prince	4	0	0
Item for a goune for Philomela	3	0	0
Item for 80 yards of flannel for the guardes' coates	5	6	8
Item for buckarum to make Jackets for lackeys and other necessities to the number of 40 yarges	1	13	4
Item for two long womans heyres	1	0	0
Item for beardes and mens heades of heyre	0	13	0
Item for fethers, spangles, roses, etcæt.	1	10	0
Item for a coate for Itys	0	13	4
Item for 4 thousand of pinnes	0	3	0
Item for a sett of musitians entertayned for the 12 dayes	5	0	0
Item to the Carpenters for setting up the stage-scaffolds twise, and lending boardes, etcett.	5	0	0
Item for butter beere at severall times	1	0	0
Item for taking downe glass windoes and mending others	3	0	0
Item pay'd to labourours for removing the snow, for stuffing the hall windoes, and such like offices	0	16	0

remarkable than the readiness with which every one seemed to respond to the call. The Prince himself promised to pay all sums lent him,—when the Greek Calends arrived, or at the end of the next great Platonic year,—and a lucky venture with their next performance revived somewhat the spirits of the players.

On Sunday evening, January 10, being properly the last day of the Vacation, it occurred to some merry spirits to produce a mock play, called *The Seven Days of the Week*, in order to provide occupation for those whose voices and persons would not allow them to appear with credit in public. As it turned out, *The Seven Days of the Week* was one of the most successful performances during the reign of the Christmas Prince; and although it was privately performed, the report came to the ears of the Vice-Chancellor and Lord Clifford, at whose desire the play was subsequently presented with greater publicity. It is perhaps the most sprightly and the most unlaboured of all the productions of the College wits. The Clerk of St. Giles's appears in the opening scene, in order to introduce his actors who are named after the days of the week. Each day describes himself in fitting and appropriate terms, and finally Sunday brings general criticisms on all his predecessors. One or two quotations will give an idea of the whole. The Clerk of St. Giles's opening speech runs thus :—

“I am the poore, though not unlettered, Clarke,
And these yo^r subjects of St Gyles his parische,
Who in this officious season would not sharke,
But thought to greet your highnesse with a morrice,
Which since my riper judgement thought not fitt,
They haue lay'd downe their wisedomes to my witt.

And that you might perceive (though seeminge rude)
Wee savour somewhat of the Academie,
Wee had adventur'd on an enterlude,
But then of actors we did lack a manye;
Therefore we clipt our play into a showe,
Yet bigg enough to speake more than wee knowe.

The subject of it was not farr to seeke,
Fine witts worke mickle matter out of nifles;
Nam'de it I haue Ye Seaven Dayes of y^e Weeke,
Which though perchaunce graue heads may judge a trifle,
Yet if their action answeare but my penninge,
You shall heare that, that will deserve a hemminge.

To tell the argument, were to forstale
 And soure y^e licquour of our sweate conceate ;
 Here are good fellowes that will tell you all
 When wee begin once, you shall quickly ha' te,
 Which if your grace will grace with your attention,
 You shall soone sounde the depth of our invention."

He then introduces his actors, one by one, the whole play irresistibly recalling the "Pyramus and Thisbe" which Bottom and his companions try to represent in *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The following is Monday's introductory speech—

"I Munday am, not he surnam'd the blacke,
 But any ordinarye one besyde ;
 Who though I carry Sunday on my backe,
 Think not that I am to his girdle tyed,
 For though his cost as myne I had as leefe use,
 Yet Munday cannot live with Sundayes refuse.

Hither I come, directed by my paper,
 To tell my name, and that's already ended :
 Then to sitt downe (which is as little labour)
 I would that each man here were so befrended :
 This oft my part is, but a little crumme
 You shal heare more, when as more actors come.

[*Sedet cum lucerna, &c.*"]

Friday apologises for himself thus—

"I would not haue you load my backe with mocks
 Though I come lade with river and sea fishes,
 Perchaunce you had rather haue each eele an oxe,
 And so would I, but 'twill not come with wishes :
 I am leane Friday, brought up in a Colledge,
 That never made good meale ṽto my knowledge."

And the Clerk adds an Epilogue in the following fashion :—

"Great Prince and mighty monarch of this place,
 The very capp of curtesy and kindnesse,
 Thinke not we come to prayse you to your face,
 For we would say as much were you behinde us.
 If we haue moov'd offence, I say, that If,
 Let not your princely choller stand too stiff.

* * * * *

But if the lanthorne of yo^r Lordshipp's love
 Should light us home through y^e mist of reprehension,
 From y^e distaffe of o^r duety we will proove
 To draw a threed of a more fine invention :

And when your brayne, feeles any payne,
With cares of state & troubles,
We'el come in kindnesse to put your highnesse
Out of y^r mumble fubbles."

On Monday, the 11th of January, the Term should have begun, but the cold had been so extreme and the frost so continuous, that the President of St. John's decided that the College vacation should last for another week. The actors too had a comedy in preparation which they were anxious to produce, and the Hall was still encumbered with the stage and scaffoldings. Some of the senior members of the College thought it would be wiser to play nothing more, partly because of their utter failure in *Time's Complaint*, partly because of the general misery caused by the severity of the weather. It gives us some idea of an old-fashioned winter to read the comment of Mr. Griffin Higgs on this subject. "The season," he says, "was so severe and tempestuous with wind and snow, which had continued some days without ceasing, and the complaint was so grievous for want of wood and meat, which by this time were grown very scant and dear, that the President and seniors urged that it was a time rather to lament and weep than make sports in. Whereupon a straight inhibition was sent out from the officers, that no man should think of playing that night or any time after till the weather should break up and be more temperate. For they thought it no way fit publicly to revel at a time of such general woe and calamity." Doubtless great disappointment was caused by this decision; but, fortunately for the actors, the weather shortly afterwards changed, a thaw set in, and on January the 15th *Philomathes* was presented with considerable success. The Term appears to have commenced on Monday, January the 18th, after a performance on the Sunday night previous of *The Seven Days of the Week*, at the President's lodging, in the presence of the Vice-Chancellor and many august doctors.

In the first week of Term the Prince and his fellow-actors, who had had such a chequered career at St. John's College, were themselves invited by the Canons of Christ Church to witness a rival entertainment, called *Yule-Tide*. The opportunity seems to have been taken to indulge in some witty pleasantries against the august Prince Tucker. *Yule Tide* was a medley of Christmas sports of all kinds, in the course of which such dignitaries as Christmas Princes were much laughed at. The histrionic mind is not very patient of criticism, and so much irritation was

produced that the Dean of Christ Church himself, who was then Vice-Chancellor, sent for Prince Tucker, and did his best to satisfy him that nothing ill-natured was really meant. The revels, however, at St. John's College were by no means terminated. The Prince, who was to have laid down his dignity on Candlemas night, was not yet ready to submit to this degradation, and instead of a form of abdication, a *Vigilate* was produced at which every member of the College was required to be present. Some were contumacious enough to go to bed: on these vengeance was taken in the following summary fashion. The marshals were sent to knock at the chambers of those who were absent: if no answer was returned, they had full authority to break open the door, to seize the delinquents in their night-shirts, and to carry them down in state to the Hall. The procession was most august and formal. The marshals walked first, with lights in their hands; two squires followed, one bearing the gown and the other the hat of their captive; then came two other squires carrying his doublet and breeches. Next followed the prisoner himself carried in a chair and covered with a blanket, and the procession was ended by a last squire carrying his shoes and stockings. Whether the severity of these regulations caused discontent or no, certain it is that the night did not end without at least one dangerous brawl. Towards the end of supper two gentlemen at the second table fell out, from words they came to blows, and one of them stabbed the other in the arm with his knife. The offender was promptly seized, and we are told "was put into my lord's stocks, where he lay most part of that night with shame and blame enough."

The Prince's resignation, which had been for some time expected, was not realised until February 9th, Shrove Tuesday, when the great stage was again set up in the Hall and the scaffolds were erected for the performance of the final scene. As the reign of the Prince had been introduced by a play dedicated to Fortune, so also was its close commemorated by an exhibition entitled *Ira seu Tumulus Fortunæ*, to designate the final term of Fortune's dynasty. All the officers who surrounded the monarch were represented in the play, together with certain general critics, such as Momus, Cynicus, and Philosophus. At the close of the performance, which appears to have gone off most successfully despite an overwhelming crowd of spectators, the Prince, who was now but a Prince in name, was conducted to his own private chamber in a solemn funereal procession. First

came attendants bearing lights and torches, followed by scholars who bore on their shoulders a tomb, adorned with scutcheons and devices appertaining to the Prince's dignity. The next figure in the procession was the Prince himself alone in his scholar's gown and hood as the chief mourner, after whom walked the rest of his Council, likewise attired in gowns and in deep mourning, to accompany their quondam lord to his last resting-place. But like many other mundane things, however difficult it might have been in starting, this Christmas celebration had still greater difficulty in finishing, and one more entertainment was imperatively demanded by the scholars of St. John's College, who had by this time become accustomed to every kind of dramatic license. An English tragedy, notwithstanding the fact that Lent had commenced, was produced on February 13th, entitled *Periander, the Tyrant of Corinth*. Mr. Tucker himself played the part of Periander, as a final exhibition of his own versatility, and received a distinguished compliment from one of the audience. A certain gentlewoman, we are told, sent him the following lines at the conclusion of the tragedy—

“ If that my hand or heart him life could give
By hand and heart should Periander live.”

Periander himself, although his own life was so much desired, came very near to depriving one of his fellow-actors of existence ; for in pretending to kill his daughter Eugenia he by accident drove his dagger through her clothes, but fortunately avoided any vital part. Such was the final scene in which the Christmas Prince took a share, after which he seems to have subsided into his former position of equality with his fellow graduates.

That England was a merry England before the Puritan came and swept all such joys away ; that even so solemn a place as Oxford felt the contagion of the general Yuletide sports—these facts are tolerably familiar to most historians ; but the most surprising feature, in such a narration as that which Mr. Griffin Higgs has left for us, is the marvellous fecundity of the College wits. No less than eight Plays were written and produced in the course of some twelve weeks, all of them of native growth and hastily composed to suit the occasion. At no other time than in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James, could such a happy vein of dramatic activity have been possible or explicable. At that period all England was dramatic, and the

academic intelligence felt the charm no less than the civic rabble of the towns. While Marlowe and Shakespeare strove to satisfy the greedy appetite of London, Canons of Christ Church and Proctors of the University had to make the best shift they could to appease similar aspirations within the University. But the gentleman who has left this curious picture of a past age has no such feelings of pride at the wealth of imagination and invention which he is describing. He is more concerned to leave a touching moral behind him, as a solemn warning to all those who should attempt the like in future years. "We intended," he says in his concluding pages, "in these exercises the practice and audacity of our youth, the credit and good name of our College, the love and favour of the University; but instead of all these (so easy a thing it is to be deceived in a good meaning) we met with peevishness at home, perverseness abroad, contradictions everywhere; some never thought themselves entreated enough to their own good and credit: others thought themselves able to do nothing if they could not thwart and hinder something; most stood by and gave aim, willing to see much and do nothing, nay perchance they were ready to procure most trouble, which would be sure to yield least help. And yet we may not so much grudge at faults at home as we may justly complain of hard measures abroad: for instead of the love and favour of the University, we found ourselves (we will say justly) taxed for any the least error (though ingenious spirits would have pardoned many things, where all things were intended for their own pleasure) but most unjustly censured, and envied for that which was done (we dare say) indifferently well: so that, in a word, we paid dear for trouble, and in a manner hired and sent for men to do us wrong.

"Let others hereafter take heed how they attempt the like, unless they find better means at home, and better minds abroad. And yet we cannot complain of all, some meant well and said well, and those took goodwill for good payment, good endeavours for good performance, and such (in this kind) shall deserve a private favour, when others shall be denied a common benefit.

"*'Seria vix recte agnoscit, qui ludicra nescit.'*"

W. L. COURTNEY.

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